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Life Investment and Psycho-Physical Well-Being in Old Age

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According to life investment theory, the importance of life domains and goals shifts across the life span (Staudinger, 1996). Developmental theories explain the adjustment of goals to current life circumstances as an adaptive mechanism to ensure psychological well-being (e.g., Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995; Brandtstädter & Renner, 1990). The present study picks up these notions by, firstly, investigating content and meaning of life investment domains by a qualitative approach and, secondly, by exploring associations of life investment domains and indicators of psycho-physical well-being by quantitative methodology. A total of 62 participants aged 65 to 89 years answered to the question “Who or what is currently very important to you?” Categories were developed using qualitative content analysis, answers were then categorized by independent raters. Inspections of frequency showed that participants mentioned their own psycho-physical well-being and relationships with family and friends as very important goals. Other emerging topics were everyday activities (e.g., going shopping), hobbies, and concrete goals (e.g., going on a vacation). Values like generativity, individual autonomy, continuity, and harmony constituted further categories. Another topic concerned goals judged as irrelevant or unrealizable (e.g., not be able to go to the movies anymore). In addition, answers covered personal worries as well as worries concerning global threats, such as war or poverty. As subsequent quantitative analyses showed, the number and valence of mentioned life investment domains was related to age and measures of psycho-physical well-being.